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Cruise line concerns prompt rewrite of dumping bill

By GLENN ADAMS

AUGUSTA, Maine — Days after cruise ship industry officials expressed concerns about a bill in Maine to regulate wastewater discharges, attempts are being made to water down the legislation.

The bill to tighten Maine's rules over discharging wastewater and sewage off the coast is now tabled in the Senate. As it stands, the bill would bar discharges of wastewater from cruise ships within state waters. But officials in the cruise ship industry don't like the Maine bill because they say it's more stringent than that of other states, a prominent Maine businessman told the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee on Monday.

Cianbro President Peter Vigue told the committee that cruise line executives with whom he spoke said Maine is "not that popular" as a destination and suggested that their ships might not call at Maine ports if the state imposes stringent discharge regulations.

"That concerns me. I know how delicate our economy is," Vigue told the committee, noting that tourism is one of the state's leading industries.

Vigue said he was in Florida last week to attend a trade show that might yield business opportunities for his construction firm. Among other maritime projects, Cianbro is interested in refurbishing the USS United States, a 1950s liner that is mothballed in Philadelphia.

Maine law does not allow vessels to pump raw sewage into coastal waters. But there are no federal or state laws against dumping partially treated sewage and "graywater" from kitchens, laundries and other ship facilities.

The Natural Resources Committee has voted unanimously in favor of a bill that would bar discharges from cruise vessels in state waters, and require licenses allowing those with advanced treatment systems to discharge effluents, said a co-chairman of the panel, Sen. John Martin, D-Eagle Lake.

Martin plans to introduce an amendment easing the restrictions, a move that left the sponsor of the original bill, Rep. Herbert Adams, D-Portland, "sorely vexed." Ships that do not have advanced effluent systems will have to hold their wastewater in state waters.

Adams said lawmakers have been working on the bill for almost a year and the industry appeared at the last minute to try to change it. Adams said he opposes exempting ships with advanced treatment systems, adding, "No other state has done it."

A lobbyist representing the International Council of Cruise Lines, John Delahanty, dismissed Adams's assertion, saying that industry officials just recently expressed their concerns about the Maine legislation, and lawmakers are responding.

A co-chairman of the Natural Resources Committee, Rep. Theodore Koffman, said he will be watching closely to make sure an easing of proposed restrictions does not compromise the quality of waters off his Bar Harbor area district, where lobstering and aquaculture are key industries.

"If any of them get zapped, we're going to have a different kind of bill next year," said Koffman, a Democrat.